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Renwick, N.

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The Belt and Road Initiative: Infrastructure and Sustainable Development

Neil Renwick

Introduction

According to the MERICS BRI database, there are already over 1,000 BRI-related projects world-wide with a total project value of over US\$25 million (Eder, 2018). But is the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) helping or hindering international sustainable development and achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? The BRI has evolved as a “global strategy” (Brînză, 2018). The stated aim of the BRI is to “promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, and realise diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries” (Government of China, 2015, §1,parag. 2). The Initiative’s intended strengthening of closer intra- and inter-regional connectivities, grounded in new transport, energy and communications infrastructure investment designed to grow production, employment and trade. Early analyses have pointed to a mixed bag of opportunities and risks associated with involvement in the Initiative (Baker McKenzie, 2017)

This chapter focuses on the extent to which the BRI is contributes achieving the Agenda 2030 and SDGs agreed in 2015. The possibility that the BRI can contribute significantly to implementing the 2030 Agenda has also attracted attention as the challenges of achieving the SDGs by 2030 are becoming more evident. The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is, in its own words, “a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative Goals and targets”. As Figure 1 indicates, the Agenda established 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets and the 193 states signing-up to the agreement made the, by now, oft-referred to pledge “that no one will be left behind” (United Nations, 2015). The agreement entered into effect on 1 January 2016.

Figure 1 The SDG Goals

GOAL 1: No Poverty
GOAL 2: Zero Hunger
GOAL 3: Good Health and Well-being
GOAL 4: Quality Education
GOAL 5: Gender Equality
GOAL 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
GOAL 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
GOAL 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
GOAL 10: Reduced Inequality
GOAL 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Figure 1 The SDG Goals
GOAL 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
GOAL 13: Climate Action
GOAL 14: Life Below Water
GOAL 15: Life on Land

However, the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018 concluded that “progress to ensure that no one is left behind has not been rapid enough to meet the targets of the 2030 Agenda. Indeed, the rate of global progress is not keeping pace with the ambitions of the Agenda, necessitating immediate and accelerated action by countries and stakeholders at all levels” (United Nations, 2018: 1). Further concerns have been raised. For example, the 2018 SDG Index and Dashboards Report argues that “most G20 countries have started SDGs implementation, but important gaps remain”; “No country is on track to achieve all the goals by 2030”; “Conflicts are leading to reversals in SDG progress”, Progress towards sustainable consumption and production patterns is too slow”; and “High-income countries generate negative SDG spillover effects” (SDSN Secretariat and Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018: 1). The BRI, as an up-and-running programme of immense magnitude and ambition, supported by an established institutional secretariat, backed by the China as the world’s second-largest economy, and with the BRI existing reach across all continents is viewed widely as an important potential instrument to help the global SDG effort. Nevertheless, as the BRI is steadily rolled-out and projects become operational, there is mounting concern over whether the benefits actually realised will be “win-win” for China’s partners and the spectrum of potential risks incurred in the implementation of the BRI ranging from adverse environmental impact, high investment exposure, political and social and cultural.

The chapter is structured around three sections: 1. Introduction. 2. The BRI in Practice—Promoting Sustainable Development? 3. Conclusions. This paper argues that the BRI’s infrastructure investment approach is helping to foster sustainable development through the building of transport, communications, and energy facilities along the routes and corridors. Clearly, these are much needed in a number of low-income economies that have signed-up to the BRI. However, the evidence of the BRI’s project work so far shows that there are major problems that need to be dealt with if this venture is going to meet the aspirations and aims of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. The raft of problems include an increased indebtedness of partner states arising from BRI projects, a lack of transparency in the contract processes and a disproportionate share of such contracts awarded to Chinese firms, and environmental protection dangers. Underlying an emerging international scepticism, opposition and so-called “pushback” against the BRI are well-known political tensions over BRI Corridors but related to wider geo-political and geo-strategic problems, perhaps most widely noted in India’s opposition to the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as it passes through the contested territory referred to by the Indian Government as “Pakistan Occupied Kashmir”. Further international reluctance to embrace fully the BRI stems from the perception that the BRI is less about a fresh approach to promoting sustainable development and growth grounded in principles of equity and “win-win” mutuality, but rather more about the BRI as a “zero-sum” instrument to meet Chinese national interests and resource needs and as a primary tool of Chinese economic, political and strategic power projection.

2. The BRI in Practice—Promoting Sustainable Development?

2.1 *The BRI as an instrument for sustainable development*

What is it that the BRI is bringing to the table of global sustainable development and is it distinctive? The initial debate surrounding OBOR/BRI was over China's intent, the central question being how far this was a grand geo-economic, geo-political and geo-strategic gambit by China to further its own national interest and global position? This remains an evident strand in the current literature on the BRI, so much so that President Xi Jinping has publicly sought to dismiss such concerns: "The Belt and Road Initiative is not a Chinese plot, as some people internationally have said. It is neither the post-World War Two Marshall Plan, nor is it a Chinese conspiracy. If you had to [call it something], it's an "overt plot."

As explained elsewhere in this volume, the OBOR/BRI has grown from a proposal made by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 and its formal launch in 2015 into a global project that currently consists of 65 countries from across the world. The BRI is structured around a number of intersecting trade and investment corridors. The BRI's aim is to act as a prime driver for investment in land and sea-based connectivity from China to regional and global markets. The *raison d'être* for the BRI lies in the conception of infrastructure capacity-building interventions designed to provide the essential platforms upon which new and stronger trade can be developed, offering the prospect for increased local production and employment opportunities and substantial revenues for the national exchequers as well as reduce national debt and steadily re-balance their balance of payments.

Certain sectors are emphasised, particularly energy, transport and communications.

There are five priority aims set out for the BRI: (1) policy co-ordination; (2) better transport, energy and information infrastructure; (3) the reduction of trade and investment barriers; (4) financial integration; and (5) the promotion of connections among people ("people-to-people relations"). The BRI also aims to strengthen environmental and energy cooperation. Total trade between China and BRI countries in 2014-2016 was more than US\$3 trillion, China's own investment in these countries surpassed US\$50 billion, and Chinese companies had established 56 economic cooperation zones in over 20 countries, generating some US\$1.1 billion of tax revenue and 180,000 jobs for them (Xinhua, 2017, parag. 12). However, the BRI is controversial, with question marks on its ambitions and operational performance. The emerging issue here is whether the BRI has the ability to deliver on its potential, and how the traditional donor community should engage with the BRI.

The BRI is being described as a new driver for sustainable development because it focuses on critical infrastructure investment and capacity-building that will increase connectivity and trade. The world faces an infrastructure investment gap. The estimated annual global infrastructure investment demand is about US\$3.7 trillion – of which only around US\$2.7 trillion is currently met (World Economic Forum, 2013). A McKinsey Global Institute Report finds that globally, there is a need to invest an average of US\$3.3 trillion annually in economic infrastructure in order to support currently expected rates of growth through to 2030. Emerging economies are projected to account for some 60% of that need. The McKinsey study concluded that if the current pace of underinvestment

continues, world infrastructure will fall short by roughly 11%, or US\$350 billion a year. The size of the gap triples if the additional investment required to meet the UN's SDGs is factored in (Woetzel, Garemo, Mischke, Hjerpe, M. & Palter, 2016).

In this context, the BRI is being held up by international organisational officials as a practical instrument for delivering the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, speaking in June 2018, stated that the BRI and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have similar vision and principles. He argued that the BRI's prioritisation of building connectivity in policy, facilities, trade, finance and among peoples is "extensively and intrinsically linked with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda . . . such connectivity can effectively advance achievement of the goals of the 2030 Agenda" (China Daily, 2017, April 13)

This shift in priority is attributable to the increased role and importance of "emerging economies", many acting as "new donors". Their approaches to development differ in key aspects of principle, policy, process and practice from the long-established system centred upon the OECD-DAC. Most prominent among these is China. Now the second-largest economy in the world with a global economic, political and steadily-emerging regional strategic reach, China has a growing role and influence as a provider of international development assistance and source of both state and private enterprise infrastructural investment in low-income economies.

Infrastructure capacity-building therefore lies at the core of this "activist view". The Asian Development Bank estimates the annual infrastructure investment needs across the BRI countries to be at least US\$1.7 trillion until 2030 (He. T., 2017, parag. 12). in response to this critical gap, China has undertaken major investment. According to the MERICS BRI database, China's investment in BRI-related infrastructure projects totals US\$25 billion i(this excludes projects still under construction or in the planning phase, which involve much larger investment volumes) (Eder, 2018, parag. 2).

Initially capitalised at US\$40 billion, the Fund is to expand to US\$100 billion. Underlining this Chinese financial commitment to financial support for the BRI, in 2015 the China Development Bank stated that it had reserved US\$890 billion for more than 900 projects (He & Kuijs, 2017). In addition, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) membership has grown from 57 founding members to a global membership of 87 members from all continents, with its projects leveraging a total of over US\$30 billion in public and private investment. The AIIB has approved investment for projects worth over US\$5.3 billion. Moreover, the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China ad South Africa), a product of the aftermath of the 2008-2009 global financial crisis, has established the New Development Bank. This is another fresh multilateral development bank (MDB), seeded with US\$50 billion in capital and formed with the intention to increase capital to US \$100 billion.

The BRI economies are increasingly important components of China's trade and investment. For the first quarter of 2018, BRI countries accounted for 29.1% of China's total exports in January-March, up from 27.9% in October-December 2017. Imports from BRI economies accounted for 25.8% of the total in January-March, rising from 25.4% in the fourth quarter of 2017. In this period, two-way trade between China and the 65 countries officially under the BRI grew by 19.4% year-on-year to US\$287.3 billion, rising from 13.8% expansion in the fourth quarter of 2017. Exports rose by 16.5% to US \$158 billion, with imports up by 23.2% to US\$128.4 billion over the same period. China's

trade surplus with BRI countries fell to US\$30.4 billion in January-March, from \$49.9 billion in the previous quarter. The BRI economies also took a sizeable share of China's overseas direct investment (ODI) flows. Non-financial ODI flows to BRI countries fell to US\$3.6 billion in the first quarter of 2018, from US\$4.8 billion in October-December 2017, but, nonetheless, this still accounted for 14.2% of total ODI flows—the highest proportion since the first quarter of 2017 (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018a).

According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's BRI Quarterly Report, whilst the BRI member economies currently total 65 countries (although the BRI website identifies 71 members at early November, 2018), in practice, China's trade and investment links are concentrated in relatively few of these. Ten countries accounted for 66.4% and 73.3% of China's export and import flows to BRI countries, respectively, in the first quarter of 2018, led by Vietnam, Malaysia, Russia, Indonesia and Thailand. Most of China's ODI flows to the BRI also went to a select number, principally Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam. The BRI Report concludes that "this suggests that Chinese companies engaging with the BRI are seeking out the more developed, and stable, markets included in the initiative" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2018a, §2, parag. 1).

Much of the BRI literature identify and overcome problems in the basic mechanics of the BRI. However, these do not take us deep enough into the heart of the problem of the BRI in terms of the BRI facilitating sustainable development. The fundamental problem is the need for transparent and effective safeguarding regulations and practices for BRI projects, i.e. a demonstrable synchronisation of BRI practices with established international norms, rules and regulations and particularly alignment with environmental and social governance (ESG). In this context, Safeguard policies are "essential tools to prevent and mitigate undue harm to people and their environment in the development process" (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2018, para. 1). Safeguards are central to processes of identifying and designing a project. The application of safeguards enable the assessment of potential environmental and social risks and the impacts (positive or negative) associated with a development intervention. Once a project is in the implementation stage, safeguards help define measures and processes to effectively manage risks and enhance positive impacts. The application of safeguard policies provides an important opportunity for stakeholder engagement, enhancing the quality of project proposals and increasing ownership. A number of international organisations, including the World Bank, OECD and European Union, have expressed apprehension that major BRI infrastructure projects present significant environmental, social, and corruption risks. For example, a Blog commentary hosted by the World Bank argues that such risks include biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, or elite capture and argues that such risks may be especially significant in countries involved in the BRI, which tend to have relatively weak governance. These risks will need to be identified and safeguards put in place to minimise their potential negative effects. The WBG and other Multilateral Development Banks could play a role in supporting the implementation of high environment, social and governance standards for BRI investments (Ruta, 2018, Risks section, para. 2).

There are a number of examples of BRI projects to which the Chinese Government points to substantiate its argument that it is fully committed to, and actively engaged with a "Green BRI". These include the funding, building and running of new transport links such as new single gauge railways (SGR), as well as renewable energy projects for wind and solar "clean" energy and new eco-industry parks. China has established itself as one of the leading global providers of renewable energy capacity (Gu, Renwick, and Lan Xue, 2018). This has helped to make renewable energy a key component of China's "Green BRI". The Chinese engagement with renewables under the BRI is as wide as the BRI membership. A

few examples are indicative of the scale of this. In Ethiopia, The Chinese-built Adama Wind Farm is the largest in Sub-Sahara. According to PowerChina, “with a total number of 136 sets installed and a total installed capacity of 204,000kW, it is the first overseas wind farm with Chinese Standard and Technology adopted” (PowerChina, 2018: 1). The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) of the BRI has seen significant development of wind energy. The UEP Wind Farm is one of five Wind Farms developed under the CPEC. With an installed capacity of 99 MW it is the largest wind power project developed under CPEC. The strengthening of the renewable energy sector under the BRI is not restricted to wind power. For example, projects developed under the auspices of CPEC illustrate the importance played by solar and hydropower. The Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park in Pakistan is one of the largest solar power plants globally, whilst the Suki Kinari Hydropower Project due completion in 2021 is located on the Kunhar river in the Kaghan valley of Pakistan (Belt and Road Initiative, 2018). If one turns to consider the component of industrial parks, a key element of the BRI corridors, the Chinese Government highlights its role in Ethiopia with the funding and construction of Africa’s largest eco-industrial park in Hawassa City, 275 kilometres southeast of Addis Ababa, opened in July 2016. The Park uses a Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) system that helps recycle 85 per cent of sewerage disposal water. Describing the development to a meeting of NEEPAD, Prime Minister Hailamariam Dessalegn argued that: “The eco-friendly industrial park will show that environmental protection and development can go hand in hand” (Embassy of Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 2016: 1). A third aspect of a “Green BRI”, on the ground, is that of transport infrastructure capacity-building. In Central Asia, three railroad connections had been completed under the BRI by Autumn 2018: Pop-Angren in Uzbekistan, Uzen-Bereket-Gorgan traversing Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran, and Khorgos dry port in Kazakhstan that connects China and Kazakhstan. A fourth, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan rail line remind under renewed discussion. Under CPEC, we can see the upgrading of the Karachi-Peshawar Railway Line and the creation of Pakistan’s first mass transit system, the Orange Line Metro Lahore (OLMT), the first of three rail lines of the Lahore Metro system. In Africa, the Mombasa-Nairobi SGR, opened in 2017, carries freight and passengers and is planned to be extended to Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan. Reflecting the inter-connected character of the BRI, Chinese firms are developing the Mombasa port and Mombasa Special Economic Zone. In Ethiopia, the US\$3.4 billion Addis Ababa Urban Rail project – the electrified Addis Ababa Light Rail Transit (AA-LRT) – has also been developed. The environmental credentials and contribution of these projects to Kenyan and Ethiopian sustainable development have been stressed by the Chinese Government (Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Ethiopia (2016, February 1; Government of China, 2017, June 1). However, in both cases, concerns have been raised within the respective countries about the mounting indebtedness being incurred and uncertainties over funding for further line extensions (Omondi, 2017, para. 5). According to current research, this concern is being more widely experienced. As Eder has noted, “excessive debt levels of many target [BRI] countries receiving Chinese loans have... sparked concerns about the BRI’s financial sustainability” (Eder, 2018, Security section, para. 3). The implications for national finances of BRI partner states of BRI-driven increased indebtedness for an economy include budgetary pressures on non-BRI development and national environmental protection projects. With respect to BRI-related rail development, evidence of “pushback” can be found in the example of the Malaysian East Coast Rail Link project, funded by China and constructed by a Chinese firm under the BRI. Although construction on the 620-kilometre link began in August 2017, under the new Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, work on the project was suspended in July 2018 due to deepening Malaysian Government concerns over the rising cost of this project and the amount Malaysia would have to borrow from China estimated by the incoming

Government as \$20 billion, thereby exceeding original estimates, and others agreed with China under the previous Government. The previous Malaysian government led by Najib Razak, a strong supporter of the BRI, agreed BRI-related infrastructure projects estimated to cost US\$34 billion (Pham, 2018: 1). In addition to such concerns, geo-political and geo-strategic factors have been the subject of increased discussion following the recent experience of Sri Lanka under the BRI. In 2017, the Sri Lankan government signed a concessionary agreement for a joint venture between the China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited (CMPort), China's state-owned port company and the Hambantota port, which is the second largest port in Sri Lanka. According to the agreement, 70 percent of the Hambantota port will be owned by the Chinese company while the Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) owns the remaining shares. The criticism of this transfer is that it resulted from an over-ambitious port/airport development that loaded Sri Lanka with an unsustainable debt to Chinese policy banks and other investors at commercial rates. This has suggested to some observers that it has led to a transfer from a development project *per se*, to a geo-strategically-important acquisition by China (Moramudali, 2017).

China has made much of its stated commitments to a "green BRI" and pledges that the BRI will adhere to global and regional environmental protection 'Safeguard' régimes. Most prominently, the Chinese Government and the United Nations worked together with a range of inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations to establish an International Coalition for Green Development on the Belt and Road, announced in May 2017. In 2017, the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection and three other ministries issued "Guidance on Promoting Green Belt and Road" and the "Belt and Road Ecological and Environmental Cooperation Plan". These policy documents are buttressed by the "Action Plan on Connecting the Belt and Road by Standards (2018-20)". Under the Action Plan, China commits itself to "expanding the fields of mutual recognition of standards and work with the countries along the BRI routes to formulate no fewer than 100 international standards, translate and launch more than 1,000 foreign versions of the Chinese standards, and carry out 2,000 key technical index comparisons in important fields" (Ministry of Environmental Protection, 2017).

An interesting element of China's approach to a Green BRI are the Green Credit Guidelines (GCG), first announced in 2012 and described by Friends of the Earth as "one of the most progressive sustainable finance policies in the world" (Friends of the Earth, 2017, para. 2). With the advent of the BRI, a recent Friends of the Earth assessment concludes that: The Green Credit Guidelines offer China and its banking sector a unique opportunity to make good on their commitment to invest sustainably. But according to our report findings, Chinese banks continue to struggle to meet their obligations to comply with host country law and international norms and standards in their overseas investments (2017, Report section, para. 2).

The question of the BRI's compliance, or at least synchronisation with, ESG has become particularly salient with the publication of "China's Arctic Policy" in January, 2018. The White Paper states that 'China will advance Arctic-related cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative' through the creation of a Polar Silk Road:

China hopes to work with all parties to build a "Polar Silk Road" through developing the Arctic shipping routes. It encourages its enterprises to participate in the infrastructure construction for these routes and conduct commercial trial voyages in accordance with the law to pave the way for their commercial and regularised operation. China attaches great importance to navigation security in the Arctic shipping routes. It has actively conducted studies on these routes and continuously

strengthened hydrographic surveys with the aim to improving the navigation, security and logistical capacities in the Arctic. China abides by the International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code), and supports the International Maritime Organisation in playing an active role in formulating navigational rules for the Arctic. China calls for stronger international cooperation on infrastructure construction and operation of the Arctic routes (Government of China, 2018).

In terms of the ESG, the White Paper and proposed Polar Silk Road are carefully crafted to present the policy within the context of what President Xi Jinping has referred to as a “community of common destiny” and set in terms of international régime compliance, specifically those pertaining to environmental protection. The White Paper seeks to rationalise China’s statement as a “Near-Arctic State” and is widely viewed as a statement of intent. Some evaluations assess the statement and Polar Silk Road in geo-political and geo-strategic terms, however, an interesting intervention in the discussion by Artur Gushchin focuses on the technical requirements to protect the environment should a ‘Northern Route’ for the BRI develop, such as the dangers posed to the arctic environment by ballast water discharges, fee charges in destination ports if ballast water be released under special procedure, instituting sensor technology that ought to be made mandatory on all commercial carriers that intend to operate in the Arctic in order to send real-time data and hence deter violations, the necessary scientific studies-particularly through the increased use of unmanned remote controlled water vessels. In addition, Gushchin’s insightful assessment points to the importance of laying submarine fiber-optic cables on the Arctic seabed. “Arctic cables can play a decisive role in the long-term exploration of mineral deposits on the seabed, since they can become docking stations for unmanned underwater vessels, enable real-time data transmission, compile existing communication services into one system and lead to standardization of the Arctic market”. Gushchin argues that, in particular, “China should pay special attention to data-centers within the Arctic members that will accumulate all the information. Major IT companies in the world have already invested up to \$1 billion to their construction in the region and are ready to double capacities within 5-10 years” (Gushchin, 2018: 1).

Such detail notwithstanding, the Polar Silk Road under the BRI has steady taken institutional form. The restructuring of the Chinese Government in 2017 saw an upgrading of the administrative infrastructure for the Polar Silk Road in the shape of the new Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) with many of the responsibilities previously held by the State Oceanic Administration (SOA), under which China’s polar activities previously were organised, have been absorbed by the new ministry. The China Institution of Navigation (CIN) has established a Polar Navigation and Equipment Committee, with a dedicated forum on polar navigation and infrastructure convened in September 2018.

Given the fragility of the arctic eco-system and indigenous peoples’ communities, the sensitivities of increased commercial, scientific and tourist traffic and ancillary activities proposed in the White Paper will require full ESG adherence, monitoring and transparency under the BRI, the Arctic Council and treaties, and wider international obligations to the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Whether this is realised in practice remains to be seen over the course of the Polar Silk Road’s development.

5. Conclusion

There is a broadly-held consensus across the major intergovernmental organisations that the aims and focus of the BRI are aligned with the 2030 Agenda and SDGs and it

represents a potentially important tool to help achieve these over the next 12 years. By placing its emphasis on building infrastructure capacity and increasing connectivity, the BRI has the potential to meet the 17 SDGs. Building new capacity that will generate new trade, production, employment and increased economic growth and GDP of the BRI partners can contribute to all the SDGs globally through interlocking national projects. Increased national governmental income can drive national policies related to SDGs such as health and well-being (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), or urban sustainability (SDG 11). Part of the attraction of the BRI for those is that it is already up and running with a world-wide partnership, backed by unprecedented levels of investment funding from China, partner Governments and MDBs, well advanced in its policy portfolio, institutionalisation and operational functionality, with a global impact. This is a central pillar of Agenda 2030 and SDG 17 “Partnership for the Goals”: “Coordinating policies to help developing countries manage their debt, as well as promoting investment for the least developed, is vital to achieve sustainable growth and development.” (UN, 2015). Clearly, the key element for realisation of the BRI’s potential contribution is the sustainability of the development, understood holistically as embracing financial and administrative durability, Corporate Social Responsibility, environmental protection and verifiable “Green Growth” that will provide the requisite basis for helping to end poverty (SDG1) and hunger (SDG 2), reduce inequalities - including those of gender (SDGs 10 and 5), as well as provide employment with dignity (SDG 8). However, the BRI in practice is spurring concerns and criticisms. As we have noted above, there are issues over the financial viability of the BRI and the economic, financial, environmental, socio-cultural, governance, corporate and political impact on the BRI partners and the wider global development project. To realise the BRI’s full potential and genuinely help attain the SDGs, these concerns need to be addressed. For example, high debt levels of many of the BRI countries receiving Chinese loans have spurred concerns about the BRI’s financial sustainability. Responding to these issues requires a recalibration of Chinese Government policy on the BRI meet the need for clear and effective safeguarding provisions for BRI projects, synchronised with established international norms, rules and regulations that are, themselves, integral to the ethos, aims and implementation of Agenda 2030 and achievement of the SDGs.

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